"BRING YOUR CAMERA" THE WESTERN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH CALIFORNIA CAMERA CLUB PRACTICE IN THE EARLY 1900S

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Drawing on the corpus of one of the most dynamic camera clubs in the United States around 1900, the California Camera Club, this article examines how photographers based in an isolated region used the landscape to formulate a triumphant history of national expansion. Through a focus on the Spanish missions of California and the Native American reservations in Arizona, the article demonstrates how the participatory practice of photography shaped a regional aesthetic iconography that not only promised access to the territory, but also proved useful to the formulation of national history. It retraces how the conflicted past of conquest over Native Americans was re-articulated through photographic practice and circulation on material supports. In a historiography of turn-of-the-century American photography dominated by artistic strivings, this study expands the analytical frame by considering camera clubs as privileged agents involved in the creation of new communities. Through a study of diverse practices, an exchange network will emerge that embeds the medium in the dense socio-cultural and economic contexts of the emerging American West. What is at stake here is the re-evaluation of often-neglected camera club practices and their contribution to carefully constructed and widely disseminated histories of the territory.

INTRODUCTION

In 1890, a group of professional and amateur photographers gathered in San Francisco to found the California Camera Club, which would become the larg-

est collective association devoted to photography on the West Coast.[1] With a membership exceeding 400 in the early twentieth century, the Club accepted professionals, Kodak 'snapshooters', and artists, male and female alike.[2] It set out to unite local photographers in order to improve their practice by drawing on the rich natural scenery of the region. At the time still a geographically distant location, isolated from the cultural centres of the East Coast, California's landscape and history became the shared focus of the practitioners. Their attraction to the particularities of the local environment reflected California's special position in national history since the mid-nineteenth century. In this period, the Gold Rush in Northern California and the subsequent exploration of the surrounding regions turned the West into a place of unparalleled opportunity for individuals, and a projection screen for an expanding nation. In this chronological configuration, California as "a new place" and photography as "a new medium" would "[come] of age together".[3] At the close of the nineteenth century, the long-standing notion of "California as a place apart, quintessentially different from mainland America" would thus become interwoven in the photographic industry of the state. By that time, the Northern regions around San Francisco housed more than 2,000 people involved in the photographic industry.[4] The turn-of-the-century members of the California Camera Club, including real estate managers, lawyers, and businessmen, but also professional photographers and writers, became embedded in this network of photographic production and circulation. What united these practitioners was an eagerness to disseminate the image of the state as a quintessentially American region: vacant for settlement, investment, and the cultivation of an idiosyncratic Western culture springing from its intimate connection to the landscape. During its most active period between 1890 and 1915, the Club reached out to practitioners across the state while it was based in the heart of San Francisco. Through print exhibitions, the monthly publication *Camera Craft*, regular lantern slide lectures, and an elaborate outing agenda with excursions to the Bay Area, Yosemite, or the Southern regions, the Club generated a vast corpus that is dispersed among numerous collecting institutions today.[5] The scale and

1 This research was generously supported by a travel grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

2 In 1900, the California Camera Club consisted of 425 active members, which qualified it as the largest club in the U.S.; Editorial, Camera Craft 1.1 (1900), 26; Michael G. Wilson, "Northern California: The Heart of the Storm," *in Pictorialism in California: Photographs 1900–1940*, eds Michael G. Wilson and Dennis Reed (Malibu and San Marino: The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1994), 5.

3 Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 2.

4 Peter E. Palmquist, "The Pioneers: Landscape and Studio," in *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Drew Heath Johnson (New York and Oakland: W. W. Norton and the Oakland Museum, 2001), 4–6. See also Dora Beale Polk, *The Island of California: A History of the Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

5 The majority of Club-related material is located at the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, the San Francisco Public Library, and the Huntington Library, San Marino.

output of this locally rooted, congenial activity confirms art historian Rachel Sailor's stance that resident photographers assisted in "the creation of culture in nascent Western communities [by] claiming, constructing, reconstructing, and appropriating the landscape they held in common".[6]

This article argues that the communal dimension of photographic practice within the California Camera Club contributed to the construction of an imagined history of the Western landscape that proved meaningful to the dominant local audience and, by the same token, just as relevant to the consolidation of an expanding American nation. Through its focus on the history of the state, which included the romanticization of its Spanish missionary past, the portrayal of Native Americans as dignified ancestors of the nation, and its landscape as a mirror of victorious settlement, the Club turned photography into an identity-shaping tool. With a focus on the photographic treatment of California's Spanish colonial heritage and of the Southwestern Indigenous peoples, this article retraces how the practices of a largely neglected group of photographers and their material manifestations shaped a dominant narrative of the landscape of the newly Americanized West and its most enticing state.

AN EXPANDED FRAMEWORK AND NEW METHODOLOGIES

If landscape photography of the American West is often referred to as a narrative of "masters", moving from Carleton Watkins in the 1870s to Ansel Adams in the 1930s, historians and curators of the medium conspicuously neglected the turn-of-the-century era during which a complex network of congenial photographic activity emerged in California.[7] Focusing predominantly on East Coast developments, the sparse scholarly works treating the California Camera Club over the past three decades have explicitly framed the practitioners' output through the lens of Pictorialism: the turn-of-the-century movement striving for the recognition of photography as an art form. Despite the visibility scholars have granted to West Coast camera clubs, their analysis remains rooted within

6 Rachel McLean Sailor, *Meaningful Places: Landscape Photographers in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), xxvii.

7 See Therese Thau Heyman, ed., *Picturing California: A Century of Photographic Genius* (San Francisco and Oakland: Chronicle Books and the Oakland Museum of California, 1989); Drew Heath Johnson, ed., *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography* (2001); Weston J. Naef, *Photographers of Genius at the Getty* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004).

a fine art approach that denies a more historically informed perspective on the highly eclectic output of the Club.[8] The research conducted for this article seeks to shed such a "framing discourse" that reduces the photograph to its formal qualities. Instead, it takes into consideration a contextual analysis that, as art historian Glenn Willumson put it, "calls for a new set of criteria rooted in the material existence of the photo-object at specific historical moments".[9] In the case of the California Camera Club, the critical focus is here set on the production context of photographs, their different material forms, as well as the discourses which accompanied their circulation. From this historically and materially informed perspective, we may retrace how Californian landscape photographs could articulate different meanings depending on their context of publication, be it in the photography magazine *Camera Craft*, in a print exhibition, or in a tourist guide. Thanks to this enlarged material scope and methodology, we exceed the previously restrained historiographical focus, and examine the California Camera Club's output from a socio-historical perspective.

Informed by recent research on camera club photography in Europe around 1900, the methodology of this article seeks to push the boundaries of the above-mentioned rigid categories and move toward new articulations of photographic corpora produced in a period defined by the concept of nationhood.[10] By looking at the articulation of a local portrayal in the context of emerging national thought, we may understand how the practice of photography became an orchestrated endeavour of a privileged group seeking to inscribe their locality into a coherent national set-up. Here, the collective exertion of a pastime and the production of tangible results became closely associated with the experience of the landscape. In the Californian case, it is crucial to recognize that the congenial production of photographs by a wealthy fraction of society was related to an emerging American imperialism, with the promise of an allegedly 'empty' Western landscape, its expansion, and prosperity at its heart. Through its long Pacific coastline, its varied landscape and Mediterranean climate, as well as its recent history of territorial seizure from Mexico

8 See Wilson and Reed, eds, *Pictorialism in California* (1994); Naomi Rosenblum, "California Pictorialism," in *Capturing Light* (2001); Stacey McCarroll and Kim Sichel, eds, *California Dreamin': Camera Clubs and the Pictorial Photography Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

9 Glenn Willumson, "Making Meaning: Displaced Materiality in the Library and Art Museum," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 76–77.

10 See Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Christian Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation: Photographie amateur et société dans l'Allemagne de Guillaume II (1888–1914)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2013).

and from Indigenous tribes, California stood as a terrain of national expectation.[11] From their isolated position on the continent's edge, pho- tographers used these prospects to formulate their own triumphant narrative of the state, which implied the fabrication of sentimentalized Spanish colonial and Indigenous pasts anchored in the local landscape. By merging national expectations with the local desire for recognition and demarcation, turn-of-the-century photographers embarked on what one curator has described as a "regional identity-building project as performed through photography".[12]

In order to understand how Club photographers contributed to and solidified the portrayal of a new national territory, we must reconstruct the variety of landscape photography practices and material supports. Here, Martha Sandweiss' notion of "the original narrative context" of photographs — that is, the discourses and material forms of publication with which they were associated — reveals their contemporary uses and reception.[13] Since the Club did not generate a single archival corpus but rather produced myriad materials, it is essential to embrace the heterogeneity of these sources. From their very complexity, we can derive the photographers' integration into the dense sociocultural tissue of California and counter the assumption of their operating in a purely artistic framework.

PROMOTING THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE: CLUB EXCURSIONS TO MISSION RUINS

The late nineteenth century saw the intensification of a search for an American identity that was strongly rooted in the continent's environment. Lacking ancient historical structures that would point to centuries-old achievements, writers and artists turned to the landscape, its expanses of land and mountain vistas, to find "surrogates for historical heritage". The *tabula rasa* of the land would point to "potentialities"; its seeming emptiness demanded to be filled with coherent meaning. A strategy to achieve this national tale was to

11 See Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Barbara Berglund, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846–1906* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

12 Jennifer A. Watts, "Picture Taking in Paradise: Los Angeles and the Creation of Regional Identity, 1880–1920," *History of Photography* 24.3 (2000), 243.

13 Martha A. Sandweiss, "Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (New York and Fort Worth: Harry N. Abrams and Publishers with the Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 126.

"[dismiss] history to embrace prehistory", which alludes to the first human settlements or the ruins of earlier populations.[14] In the American Southwest, notably the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, the landscape was dotted with architectural structures that could be smoothly integrated into this search for a prehistoric heritage: the Franciscan mission churches, built during Spanish colonial rule between 1769 and 1823 to force Indigenous populations into Christian conversion and labour. California alone had twenty-one missions, located between San Francisco and San Diego, that left behind what historians have termed "a legacy of genocide" in which the Indigenous population was decimated to one quarter of its original number through forced labour and introduced disease.[15] Gradually abandoned after 1821 when Mexico gained independence from Spain, the missions became ruins; their stucco structures and flower-bedecked arches became the most attractive feature of both regional historical research and tourism by 1900. The contemporary desire to create "a heroic national past with Anglo-Saxon dominance", especially in the Western-most areas of the United States, was reflected in the cultural-historical treatment of the missions, especially in illustrated accounts.[16] In this process of fashioning a sentimental past and a potential future endowed with a distinct national identity, the departed Spanish settlers and remaining Native Americans became 'artifacts' of a bygone era.[17] More importantly, the Indigenous population's conversion under Spanish rule was depicted as a European ideal of philanthropy, which Californian institutions like the recently established Stanford University sought to celebrate.[18]

As a popular organization with firm local anchorage, the California Camera Club cultivated close ties to the businesses and institutions sponsored by railroad capital, notably Leland Stanford's. To further their historical interest and to promote the attractive Southwestern landscape reachable via the railroad's lines, members would plan regular excursions to the missions by the 1900s. These activities — usually including dozens of fully equipped photographers embarking on a week-long round-trip — and their results, must be approached

14 David Lowenthal, "The Place of the Past in the American Landscape," in *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy,* eds David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 96–103.

15 The 65,000 Native Americans that encountered the missionaries in this period were reduced to 17,000 by 1832. See James A. Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1987).

16 Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), xii.

17 Phoebe Schroeder Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5–10.

18 John Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California: Cultural Philanthropy, Industrial Capital, and Social Authority* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 217–20, 228.

through the societal conditions they implied. As the Club's network consisted chiefly of bourgeois San Franciscans with a predefined conception of the landscape triggered by economic imperatives, the photographers must be considered as "representative of a more powerful, wealthy, and industrialized culture". As such, their depictions of the local landscape, its history, and its inhabitants, must be evaluated from their "position of mastery", which implies both the technical proficiency demanded by their cameras and equipment, and an authoritative vision of their subject matter.[19] Especially in the American West, the mastery of these and other technologies, such as an extensive railroad structure, has been a central vehicle to articulate the vision of a new, predominantly 'American' culture.[20] From this perspective, the following photographic activities embraced by Club members can be described through what W. J. T. Mitchell termed "a body of cultural and economic practices that makes history in both the real and the represented environment, [and] play[s] a central role in the formation of social identities".[21]

Numerous examples of photographic representation related to this identity-shaping landscape practice can be found in the monthly journal *Camera Craft*. Running for more than four decades (from 1900 to 1942), the magazine's first ten years intensely covered Club developments. As a major platform, the magazine allows us to reconstruct their outing agenda, material products of excursions, and their desired representation. In the absence of a coherent Club corpus, *Camera Craft* is a crucial source whose mélange of photographic exchange and commentary on local matters reveals the photographers' striving for recognition of both the practice *and* of the state's history. A decisive feature of the magazine's coverage were outings to the Californian and Southwestern missions, as well as to Native American reservations. While the magazine covered excursions to missions in both Arizona and California, it was in the photographers' home state that the on-site practice was most efficiently encouraged as a playing field. Here, the missions and their complex histories were re-framed in aesthetic terms. Members contributed to this reformula-

19 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic Histories, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxix.

20 David E. Nye, *Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997); see also Peter Hales, *Silver Cities. Photographing American Urbanization, 1839–1939* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

21 W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.

tion by simultaneously taking on the role of artists, promoters, and preservationists. National history writings in the early twentieth century included an active alignment with "the best of Spanish colonization, loving gentle efforts to usher Indians into the world of civilized and Christian men". Manifestations of popular culture, such as illustrated travel accounts and theatre, strikingly integrated this affiliation with the Spanish past.[22] In the American West — a landscape marked by ethnic diversity and recent territorial conflict — this alignment allowed new communities to envision a shared history and rely on a legitimate heritage of conquest. *Camera Craft* encouraged this process as it

22 Sherry Lynn Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158–59.

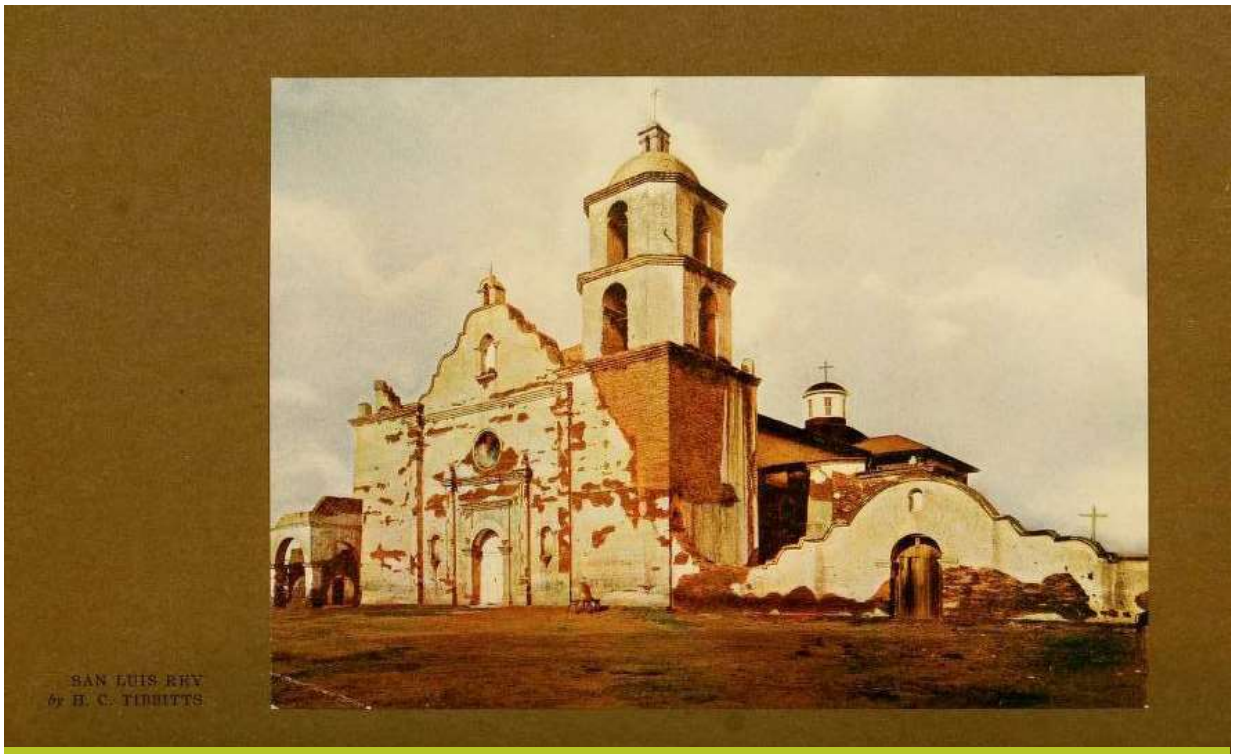

Fig. 1 Howard C. Tibbitts, *San Luis Rey,* n.d. In Charles S. Aiken, "The California Missions and Their Preservation." *Camera Craft* 4, no. 2 (1901): 60. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

urged readers to dedicate their photography to the historical exploration of the state's landscape.

By December 1901, a six-page illustrated article with a frontispiece of San Luis Rey mission taken by one of the Club's founding members and professional photographers, Howard Tibbitts (Fig. 1). The opulent facade of the building, covered in tones of terra cotta and shades of sundown, constituted an appealing motif not only to photographers, but also to the magazine's general readership. By reproducing familiar locations of the local landscape in an artistic framework, the public was incited to take up cameras, join the Club, and engage in on-site practice. As Tibbitts was instrumental in rallying participation in outings, his professional works attracted a public eager to achieve a comparable degree of artistry. In addition to recounting the history of the missions, the article's author, Charles Aiken, carefully laid out the historical interest in the Californian landscape and its Spanish heritage as "a project that should appeal to all artists of pen, pencil, brush or camera".[23] By cultivating an aesthetically sensitive eye to the mission's architectural features as well as its interior treasures including manuscripts and furniture, photographers were to take on the role of preservationists of a victorious "far-western history". By collectively committing to the missions, they were to maintain the historical goals of these structures: to "teach […] of civilization's march". In this process, the Californian landscape — where "the storied walls are few [and] all is new except Nature's own creations" — would gain historical density and become an integral part of a national narrative of settlement.[24]

The ambition to preserve and to disseminate the dominant narrative in aesthetically pleasing terms was invigorated by the collective exertion of landscape photography. As an increasingly accessible endeavour, heightened by the existence of popular organizations like the Club, photographic exploration became a powerful tool to perpetuate a local history of the landscape. Here, the Club's outing agenda envisioned with the support of local railroad compa-

23 Charles S. Aiken, "The California Missions and their Preservation," *Camera Craft* 4.2 (1901), 64.

24 Ibid., 60.

nies, integrated even broader publics. Howard Tibbitts was key to this development, as he was not only a founding Club member, but also an acclaimed professional photographer for the Southern Pacific Railroad, California's most powerful enterprise. What *Camera Craft* described in its mission history article as "the swinging ball of progress" in occupying new territories would resonate with the larger audience of railroad passengers on the Southern Pacific lines.[25] As a company that had originated in and operated from California, its managers proudly disseminated attractive Western imagery to lure settlers and investors to the region. To achieve this goal, Southern Pacific substantially increased its advertising budget and commissioned works by local photographers, notably members of the Club.[26] By 1898, it had launched its first magazine, *Sunset*, with the declared goal of providing "[p]ublicity for the attractions and advantages of the Western Empire".[27] By 1905, *Sunset* had a circulation of 58,000, of which New York City would receive some 3,000. The use of reproducible photographic imagery was key to this dissemination, as the editors of *Sunset* opted for the creation of an "immense circulating library" that was meant to be displayed "on the walls of railroad stations, in clubs, in hotels, in busy offices", with the desire to "weave in the brains of men visions and fantasies untold wherein California shall appear a signboard".[28]

The goal of advertising the Californian landscape for settlement and investment went hand in hand with the densification of its historical environment, which served as the breeding ground for an imperial future. As the missions bore witness to the process of 'civilizing' the West, they introduced the onset of an American settlement that controlled its Indigenous population and opened their formerly occupied land to investment, and thus, national prosperity. In this regard, the collaboration between Club member and Sunset photographer Howard Tibbitts, and his *Sunset* editor friend and *Camera Craft* contributor Charles Aiken, is unsurprising.[29] In their advertisements, the two magazines provided powerful platforms on which the coalition of aestheticized, romanticized mission imagery and the vocabulary of Western empire-building

25 Ibid., 60.

26 See Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 130–65; Peter Palmquist "William E. Dassonville: An Appreciation," in *William E. Dassonville, California Photographer, 1879–1957,* eds Susan Herzig and Paul Hertzmann (Nevada City: Carl Mautz, 1999), 15.

27 *Sunset* 1.1 (1898).

28 "Telling the World about California: How the Southern Pacific is doing it," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 January 1905, 43.

29 On *Sunset*'s early history, see Paul C. Johnson, ed., *The Early Sunset Magazine, 1898–1928: Selections from Sunset Magazine's First 30 Years* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1973).

could be articulated and made available to a larger public. These collaborative strategies reveal what Mitchell termed "the double role [of the landscape] as commodity and potent cultural symbol".[30] Since the Club presented its outing activities in various shapes, particularly illustrated accounts, they could target audiences within and beyond state borders. These endeavours show how the Western landscape and its most attractive historical features, the Spanish missions, attained not only a commercially useful, but also a culturally empowering character.

Beyond excursions and travel accounts, the Californian mission imagery also served the photographers' self-definition as Westerners. The isolated regions in which they operated, as well as their accessibility via the railroad lines of a California-native enterprise, helped the photographers define their practice as an idiosyncratic experience of the Western landscape. Next to the sentimental vistas and vocabulary circulating within Club circles, the photographers also integrated this Western paradigm into their artistic creation. When the Club organized a series of photographic salons in San Francisco between 1901 and 1903, its goal was to share a "representative collection of pictures that can be identified as Western", implying photographs of the local landscape and of Native American history.[31] A vast majority of works submitted to these artistic salons covered the state's natural surroundings and thus attested to the photographers' commitment to on-site work. Well attended by the local public, the salons served as rallying events that celebrated the region's "vast out of doors" in San Francisco's only art institution, the Mark Hopkins Institute.[32] As a sponsor of both the art institute and the Club, Southern Pacific was directly involved in these cultural manifestations, notably in the salon catalogue, which featured an elaborate advertisement for "the paradise of the photographer, traversed by the lines of the Southern Pacific".[33]

The salon contributors, for their part, carried this collaboration further in subject matter, by covering the locations on local train lines. Oscar Maurer,

30 W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 15.

31 "The Second San Francisco Photographic Salon, Its Strong and Weak Points with a Criticism of Its Striking Features," *Camera Craft* 4.3 (1902), 89–90.

32 Mabel Clare Craft, "The Popular Side of the Salon," *Camera Craft* 2.4 (1901), 300.

33 *Catalogue of the Third San Francisco Photographic Salon at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, October 8 to 24, 1903* (San Francisco: San Francisco Art Association and California Camera Club, 1903).

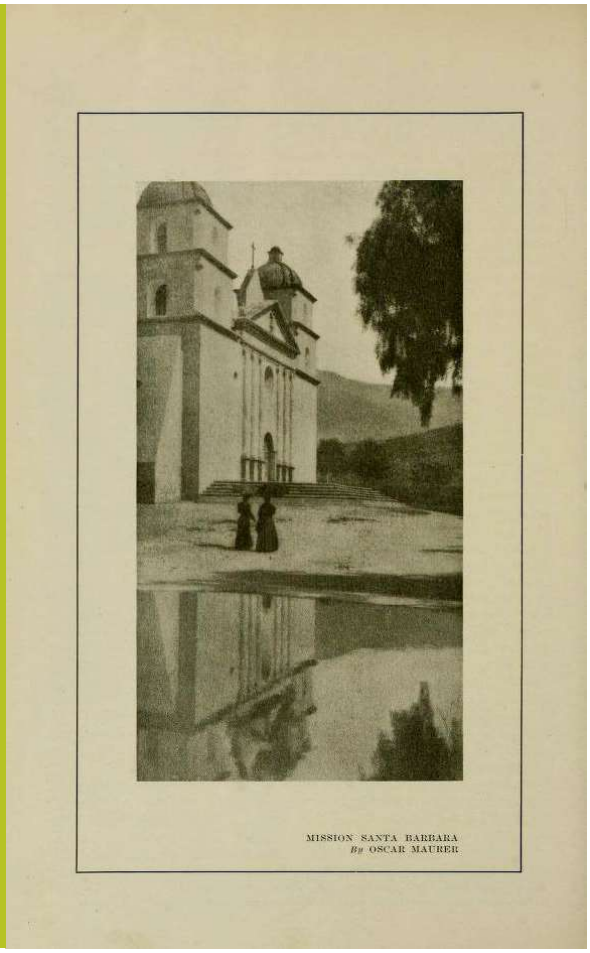

Fig. 2
Oscar Maurer, *Mission Santa Barbara*, ca. 1902. In *Camera Craft* 7, no. 3 (1903): 90. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library).

a Club member and regularly commissioned photographer, must have been among the first to benefit from the Southern Pacific connection to Santa Barbara that opened in 1902. His photograph *Mission Santa Barbara* (Fig. 2), and its inclusion in the 1903 salon, reflect the omnipresence of these structures in the process of community-building in the state. A "Spanish dream city", Santa Barbara's architectural design mirrored the location's colonial past and opted for an urban re-enactment of the state's popular mythology.[34] The Club photographer's work submitted to the salon combined both the artistic and

34 Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 260–64.

the popular promotional aspect embodied by the mission. Showcasing two female figures in elegant American attire approaching a monumental mission church, the photograph echoed the often-claimed 'mysterious' aura. The grand stucco facade is accompanied by a weeping willow to the right, both of which find their reflection in a pond in the foreground. The image thus merged the romance of discovery, promised by the train lines and by the photographer, with a sense of timelessness heightened by the pond's tranquil reflection. Adventurous discovery and accessibility were further underlined by the choice of two female visitors, communicating safety and sentimental attraction to a larger public.

As these examples emphasize, California's Spanish missionary past and its intimate connection to the state's environment became useful cultural and promotional rallying tools in photography. As a symbol of victorious conquest and an easily sentimentalized prop, the mission structures served the construction of a dominant regional cultural identity, while at the same time revealing the increasing commodification of the landscape for tourism and historical exploration. If the popular treatment of these structures and their remote placement expose the strategies of local photographers to articulate a national narrative, we must now turn to the actual populations, who formed the core of Western American heritage, yet were largely omitted.

THE SOUTHWEST AS KODAKING TERRITORY: REPRESENTATION OF THE HOPI AND NAVAJO

At the heart of the reformulation of the Southwestern American landscape's conflicted past stands the depiction of Indigenous peoples as objects of artistic study and performers in a romanticized local-patriotic narrative. By the close of the nineteenth century, a period referred to by cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg as the "age of attrition", Native Americans had been defeated even in the most remote areas of the nation's territory, and their existence reduced

to separated reservations. Having undergone a process of pacification, they no longer constituted a threat to national expansion. Instead, the Indigenous origins of the continent were inserted into an increasingly aggressive foreign policy agenda that pushed for the creation of an American empire. To legitimize imperial ambitions and to infuse the national character with a historical heritage of conquest, the country's Indigenous population was "assigned a key place in the emerging nationalist iconography as token of the triumph over savagism". As noble warriors with age-old traditions, the image of a bygone Native American dominated the emerging national identity in the 1900s and served as "a figure from whom authenticity might be derived".[35] In as much as the missions were to embody the dense historical fabric of the Western landscape, the generic figure of "the Indian" — robbed of his ethnic diversity — took on an ancestral function in the national imagination. Importantly, by relegating the conquest of Native Americans to the past and pacifying the Indigenous populations' contemporary condition, historical research and popular accounts of the time turned them into "authentic relics of another culture, not participants in the struggle" of modern society.[36] This progressive absorption of Indigenous populations into the historical and the imagined landscape became especially tangible in the tourist industries and popular culture of the American West, to which the Camera Club contributed in excursions and illustrated accounts.

Outings occupied a central place in the Club's agenda, and the variety of destinations revealed the members' desire to cover large parts of not only the Californian, but also the broader Southwestern landscape. A recurring element of the excursion schedule was the Grand Canyon in Arizona and its adjacent Native American reservations in Navajo County. By 1906, the Santa Fe Railroad, a competitor of the Southern Pacific, advertised a two-week round trip through this region, coming a total cost of $125, about twice the amount of a month's salary at the time. Advising photographers in big letters to "Bring your camera", the organizers promised a packaged tour that included the Grand

35 Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha,* 22–33.

36 Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174–75, 194–97; Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, xxiv.

Canyon and a visit to the Hopi village of Oraibi, a part of the Hopi reservation in the surrounding Navajo County.[37] Shortly before the advertised trip, Oraibi had witnessed a split in its community between pro- and 'anti-Anglo' groups. The former group was less reluctant to embrace missionary endeavours and accepted American dominance, while the latter formed a new settlement not far from the village.[38] From the 1890s, Oraibi had been frequented by professional photographers, scientific explorers, and travel writers for its staging of the Snake Dance ceremony. By 1900, photographers were likely to be seen in crowded locations just off the ceremonial site in order to obtain the best shot. Regardless of objections to the documentation of these annual dances, Hopi villages saw ever-growing numbers of photographers flocking in. Since the reservation was marked by "small isolated groups" that were known to be "less hostile", the Hopi people became the preferred motifs of visitors.[39] During ceremonies, a photographer could be found "kicking down another fellow's tripod and sticking his elbow in the next fellow's lens", as one witness wrote in *Camera Craft*.[40] Regardless of such frustrating experiences, the magazine encouraged participation in these outings as a form of congenial competition and an opportunity to experiment with the camera on site, in what was called a "wild, exciting, and interesting" setting.[41]

Next to the intrusion into the Natives' personal space, the excursions promised access to the territory and its inhabitants. While participation in outings required both financial means and time expenditure, it also integrated a predefined conception of the landscape by its participants who would assume ownership of the local landscape and channel their encounters with the native population through a set of aesthetic, compositional features; what James Faris has termed "limited photographic registers". The circumscribed span of these motifs, ranging from "assimilation, pastiche, and adaptation", to "preservation, nostalgia, and pastoralism", became apparent not only in the aforementioned mission photographs, but were also integrated into illustrated accounts of Native Americans themselves.[42] In his 1909 publication *With a*

37 "Santa Fe Trip to Moqui Land and the Grand Canyon," *Camera Craft* 13.1 (1906), 268.

38 Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 82–83.

39 James C. Faris, *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of an American People*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 158–61.

40 George Wharton James, "The Snake Dance of the Hopis," *Camera Craft* 6.1 (1902), 7.

41 "Santa Fe Trip to Moqui Land and the Grand Canyon," 267.

42 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 19, 40–41.

Kodak in the Land of the Navajo, the professional photographer, Club member, and long-standing *Camera Craft* contributor Frederick I. Monsen drew on these romanticizing registers to turn the Navajo reservation in Arizona into a playful terrain for the 'Kodaking' tourist. At the heart of this endeavour was the Eastman Kodak Company, which from the 1890s exerted a massive influence on perceptions of popular photography practice. With an annual advertisement budget of $750,000, Kodak would shape the uses of the medium in American society in following decades. Its mission "to redefine amateur photography in terms of ease and simplicity" worked toward a conceptualization of photography as a pastime to be exerted congenially in the outdoors.[43] The inclusive set-up of the California Camera Club, addressing both committed and beginning practitioners, reflected this goal and members rapidly jumped on Eastman Kodak's promotional bandwagon. Since commissions by railroad officials had been common procedure at the Club from the onset, the collaboration with photographic suppliers was a natural extension. What merged in Monsen's publication, however, was not only the Club's liberal perception of photo practice, but also its ideological roots in the dominant portrayal of the landscape.

Monsen's travelogue of Navajo County thus set out with the desired contemporary representation of an Indigenous male figure. Adorning the cover, the coloured reproduction of a Navajo man on horseback reflected the vivid patterns of Indigenous rugs used for the booklet's wrapper.[44] Covered in shades of red and grey, the man took on the emblematic posture of a warrior, ornamented by a headband and necklaces. While this kind of coloured reproduction was far from what was available to ordinary users of the Kodak camera at the time, the cover promised access to both a high-quality photographic production and to intriguing details of Native American life. The booklet itself would follow this pattern of merging seemingly simple photographs with insights into Arizona's remote regions. Referring to the instantaneous capacity of the pocket camera, Monsen and Eastman emphasized the authentic portrayal that was sought after by visitors. The author's promise of "a freedom

43 Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 15–40.

44 The author decided not to reproduce these depictions. Digital reproductions of Monsen's book can be accessed through an online search.

from studied poses" and "the charm of simplicity" was visually underlined by a portrait of himself surrounded by seven Navajo children, captioned "his Navajo Kindergarten".[45] Set against an arid landscape, the children clustered haphazardly around the photographer who attempted to strike a compassionate pose in directing his gaze toward one of the girls. These representations of alleged 'friendship' had become a common trope by the 1890s and were strongly defended by Monsen and other photographers in the region. Yet the enormous output of imagery these encounters generated (in the case of Monsen, up to 10,000 images by the mid-1900s), paired with their dominant textual depiction, leave little doubt about the photographer's expectations vis-à-vis his subjects.[46]

While the cover of Monsen's booklet may evoke notions of virility and dignity, his textual account and choice of imagery reduced the Navajo to a childlike condition. In reverse, the photographer himself assumed the dominating position, achieved through the description of his photographic practice. Tying in with Susan Sontag's notion of "the diligent hunter-with-camera" who seeks to "[track] down and [capture]" "[t]he view of reality as an exotic prize", Monsen's quest for historical authenticity was informed by his exertion of the practice in an Indigenous setting.[47] Wearing the camera like armoury fastened to his belt — as he put it, like a "rifleman" who "[hits] the target when firing from the hip" — the photographer re-enacted scenarios of conquest.[48] By carrying them out in the casual 'Kodaking' manner, these scenes serve to "normaliz[e]" the process of occupying the Western landscape and pushing out its original inhabitants.[49] By the same token, Monsen's Southwestern environment became a vacant territory for the photographer-explorer, and an invitation to potential Kodak tourists. It embodied the promise of the Western landscape as the source of the country's "unique cultural heritage", freely available for exploration and historical narration.[50] Contemporary audiences perceived his work in exactly these terms, by inserting him into "the trail of the Spanish pioneers" and giving his allegedly spontaneous photographs "the stamp of reality".[51] Through his adoption of the Kodak vocabulary of simple yet artful

45 Frederick I. Monsen, *With a Kodak in the Land of the Navajo* (Rochester: Eastman Kodak Company, 1909), introduction, n.p.

46 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 77, 152–53.

47 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 54–55.

48 Frederick I. Monsen qtd. in Thomas VanderMeulen, *Frederick I. Monsen* (Tempe: School of Art, Arizona State University, 1985), n.p.

49 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 15.

50 Martha A. Sandweiss, "Dry Light: Photographic Books and the Arid West," in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, ed. May Castleberry (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 26.

51 Sadakichi Hartmann, "Frederick I. Monsen: The Stamp of Reality," in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Profiles of Photographic Pioneers*, eds Sadakichi Hartmann, Harry W. Lawton, and George Knox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 293–96.

production, Monsen made both the medium and his subject matter available to those who sought to inscribe their experience of the landscape into the celebrated history of national expansion.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the California Camera Club's landscape photography practices, we have seen how collectively produced depictions of the local environment have strengthened a dominant historical portrayal of the American West. The participatory club's production, the cultivation of a shared discourse on the landscape and its history, and the affiliation with a privileged network of local promotion demonstrate how the practice of photography around 1900 informed the creation of a nationally relevant narrative in isolated regions of the United States. By choosing the ruins of Spanish missions in California and the constrained living spaces of Native Americans in Arizona, the photographers sought to reshuffle the cards of history and create a lineage with both European civilization and Indigenous antiquity. The reliance on these motifs in aestheticized and fictionalized terms allowed them to develop an iconography that reflected the search for an American identity. What is at stake here is an appropriation of the landscape and its inhabitants for both the affirmation of a dominant regional identity and, in the words of Alan Trachtenberg, "a construction of the white imagination […] filling the need for a contemporary romance of nationality".[52]

Given the variety of Camera Club productions, we must re-evaluate initial uses and accompanying discourses. Whether accounts of group excursions in illustrated magazines, exhibition prints, or tourist booklets, these sources are textual-visual vehicles which consolidated authoritative narratives of the local landscape through their dissemination and thereby strengthened a new national history. The continuous neglect of Western Camera Club material in the history of turn-of-the-century American photography and the framing

52 Alan Trachtenberg, S*hades of Hiawatha*, 50.

of these sources along the lines of art-historical analysis has wider repercussions for cultural histories. They reinforce the oblivion of a practice, which contributed substantially to the popular imagery of the time through its diverse material supports and its reliance on communal identification. In challenging ourselves to move beyond the white noise of promotional rhetoric and the undeniable charm of the landscape photographs, and focus instead on the context of production, we come to see a complex cluster of photo-textual material which facilitated the persistence of dominant discourses on the landscape. Here, the contemporary "reality claims" of the medium and its adaptability to "a discourse of authenticity and stability" came to merge and favour notions of cultural domination.[53] And these were the exact ingredients required to imagine the history of a new national landscape in the West.

53 Elizabeth Edwards, "Afterword," in *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation*, eds Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 322.

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